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ABSTRACT

Public education needs the results orientation and performance accountability mandated by a management system. Schools need a management system around which to lay plans to solve problems and reach ever higher levels of accomplishment in serving the needs of students. Management by objectives provides the school administrator with such a systematic procedure for involving his staff in problemsolving efforts. (Author/WM)

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MANAGEMENT BY OBJECTIVES*
Planning Where to Go and How to Get There

by
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I am delighted to be with you this evening for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the opportunity to visit a State whose mountainous beauty rivals my own home territory in the Rockies. I must say someone had an eye for asthetics as well as business in choosing Jackson's Mill as the site for this meeting. I commend your judgment and sense of values in electing to live and work in West Virginia.

Another reason I am delighted to be here is that I feel a special comradeship with you who occupy the hot seats in education, as local superintendents and State education agency officials. I've served as local superintendent--twice, in fact--and as Chief State School Officer. I know from experience that these are the real firing line positions in education. This is where the hard decisions--about finance, staffing, curriculum, compensatory programs, desegregation, and many other matters--must be made and lived with.

So I have come to the right group of educators to share some thoughts about a subject that will command much of my attention as U.S. Commissioner of Education because, in my judgment, it is the only way to deal systematically with the rising costs of education on one hand, and the rising expectations of students, parents, and taxpayers on the other. That subject is account-ability.

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*Before the West Virginia Association of School Administrators, Jackson's Mill, West Virginia, July 16, 1974.

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In the minds of many, accountability is a "shape up or ship out" proposition. Too often accountability has been viewed simply as a device to fix upon individuals responsibility for failure. The rhetoric has, as I see it, concerned itself more than can be justified with blame fixing for failures and shortcomings. I reject this orientation toward accountability. I suggest that the ends of accountability should focus upon students. These ends should be concerned with serving students and solving problems identified through assessment of educational needs of students.

The means of achieving accountability will occupy most of my presentation, although I do want to get back to the ends of accountability later on.

I first learned about management by objectives during my tenure in the United States Office of Education. You may recall that the U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare has been labeled by some as an unmanageable bureaucracy. I watched as the MBO system was implemented in HEW. I had the painful responsibility, as Acting Commissiner, to learn about MBO as we applied these principles in the U. S. Office of Education. Following my federal experience with MBO, I became convinced, as Superintendent of the Granite School District in suburban Salt Lake County, that schools could gain much from utilization of this management system as a means for attaining performance accountability.

In the Granite system we had modest success in implementing this management system in a school district with 63,000 students and 72 schools. I do not believe that I am exaggerating when I report to you that the principals have moved from a point of frustration to one of considerable enthusiasm and support for MBO. We find that it provides the administrative means for

accountability and that its requirement for involvement of the faculty in dialogue and decision making helps us to know that we will have utilized the collective wisdom of the entire staff in pointing in the direction that we should go as a school system.

Let me discuss a somewhat extensive description of a model that, I believe, will provide the means for accountability.

MBO As a Management System
Oriented to Attaining Institution-Wide Performance Accountability

Many of us in leadership positions in education have for some time been concerned about how we might devise a means that would make school management more results-oriented, with the outputs becoming a prime source of concentration and concern on the part of school managers. In this quest for results-oriented management, we have been turning more and more to the system of management utilized by industry wherein annual goals are set and the entire resources of an organization are focused upon attaining specified objectives. This management system has been called "management by objectives"--MBO for short. School management by objectives is becoming a topic of increasing concern as some of the larger school systems across the Nation turn to this management system as a means of attaining performance accountability. MBO involves a total institution. Its focus is upon institutional performance rather than the performance of individuals. It is, therefore, not as threatening to teachers and other staff members as are those accountability programs that center attention on the specific performance of individual teachers.

I would like to describe briefly how an MBO system functions in a school district. From this description you may be able to judge more clearly the potential of MBO as a means to attain performance accountability in your own districts.

The first step in an MBO system is to conduct an assessment of the most critical educational needs in the school district. This assessment should try to identify the problems most urgently in need of solution.

The second step calls for the chief executive officer, usually the superintendent of schools, to review the results of the needs assessment and to identify some high level performance priorities. These priorities should be issued in tentative form only. The chief executive, in issuing these performance priorities, will be saying to the professional staff in the school system that these are, in his view, after careful study of the needs assessment effort, the specific problems that need district-wide attention and effort toward solution.

The third step in the MBO program is a system-wide critique of the superintendent's tentative performance priorities. The staff should have an opportunity to add to and subtract from the tentative priorities. This should provide an opportunity for the entire professional staff to engage in some lively discussions about what is and what ought to be in terms of performance outcomes to be sought on a high priority level for the coming academic year. Each member school should offer the superintendent a very candid response to the tentative performance priorities.

The fourth step is for the chief executive officer to review all of the feedback from the schools and then formulate his final performance

priorities for the coming academic year. At this point, the superintendent will issue a number of performance priority statements describing the major problems that will receive special attention and special management concern from the school district.

These performance priorities should describe problems with sufficient back-up information to justify and call attention to the need for a major campaign throughout the year to solve them.

The fifth step in the MBO program is for each school to review carefully the final performance priority statements issued by the superintendent. The principal and the faculty should examine the performance of their particular school to determine if it is contributing to a major problem identified on the district level. Some performance priorities will require attention of some schools but not others. For example, a performance priority calling for a decrease in dropout rates will be of higher concern to secondary schools than to elementary schools. A performance priority calling attention to low achievement in basic reading and arithmetic skills may be a district-wide problem, but it will certainly occupy more specific attention from elementary schools than from senior high schools. (This is not to say that basic study skills are not also the concern of senior high schools.)

Each school should complete a critical analysis of its own problems and performance concerns, giving due consideration and attention to the superintendent's performance priorities. The school should identify problems that it should strive to solve during the coming academic year. These problems should be responsive to the chief executive's performance

priorities but they are also a source of concern to the principal and faculty.

The sixth step in the MBO program is for each school to prepare written objectives that will require special management concern during the next academic year. These written objectives should be performance-oriented. That is, they should state in quantifiable terms, insofar as possible, what will be accomplished within a certain time frame. The objectives should say how much and by when.

Some objectives are very important, but hard to quantify. These aspects of the school program should not be ignored. However, to the largest extent possible, the written objectives should be specific and should be expressed in outcome-oriented language that will make it possible for all concerned to measure and understand when and if the objective has been reached.

Usually, the school should limit its major objectives to ten or less. It is important to emphasize that all performance outcomes of the school will not be committed to written performance objectives. Include only those high priority problems that are going to get special attention and unusual effort.

When a school system first begins to implement an MBO system it is usually recommended that approximately three objectives be adopted by each school for special management concern. Following mastery of the management system in subsequent years more objectives can be adopted and effectively managed.

The seventh step in an MBO program is for the central office staff to review and respond to the written objectives prepared by each school. The central office should check carefully to see that no school has

ignored a major performance priority issued by the superintendent in which it is particularly deficient. If a school is contributing to a particular high level deficiency, the central office staff should attempt to persuade the principal and the faculty to include this objective.

Objectives should not be imposed upon a school by the central office. If the central office cannot persuade the principal and faculty to revise their objectives, there should be no effort to impose changes dictatorially. Only those objectives that have the commitment and concern of the principal and faculty will have a chance for accomplishment. Imposed objectives will most likely not result in beneficial results for anyone.

Additionally, the central office staff should make sure that the resources necessary to accomplish a school's objectives will be available for the coming academic year. It is important that the central office give the necessary support and make the needed commitments on the district level so that schools will have a good chance of realizing the objectives they have submitted.

The eighth step in the MBO program is for each school to prepare final written objectives. These objectives become a performance commitment between the school and the superintendent. When the final written objectives are submitted to the central office the school has pledged to make a special effort to reach some highly desirable performance outcomes during the coming academic year. It has pledged that quantifiable results will be attained by specific times. A special effort will be mounted to solve specific problems that have been identified so that the school may more effectively meet the needs of its students.

This is where the school's performance accountability effort comes into focus. This is the point at which we attain results-oriented management and accountability that apply to an entire school rather than to a specific individual. The principal and the faculty have committed themselves to measurable goals and the central office has committed itself to certain supportive activities.

The ninth step in the MBO program is operational planning. For each objective adopted by the school some time-phased action steps must be prepared. These time-phased action steps will constitute a road map or a travel itinerary. Through operational planning, the school will try to specify action that it will take by certain deadlines in order to move in an orderly and sequential procedure to realize the major performance outcome represented by a significant objective. The time-phased action steps should spell out who will do what by when. They should show how resource commitments will be made and what has to be done by what time in order for a highly desirable and important performance outcome to be reached during the academic year. This operational planning phase is very important. It is vital that all faculty members responsible for reaching the major objective have an opportunity to participate in the operational planning and in suggesting alternative ideas for reaching specific outcomes.

The tenth step in the management by objectives program is the operational implementation of the action steps. Steps one through nine should have been accomplished prior to the new school year. Preparations should be ready so that the on-going school program will move forward and the special efforts to manage for specific outcomes can be implemented during the year.

Step eleven calls for regular monitoring of progress in reaching each major objective adopted by the school. This monitoring of progress is usually accomplished by holding monthly management review conferences. These conferences are called by the superintendent of schools or his designated representative. On a monthly basis, the principal and selected staff members sit down with the central office representatives and discuss their stewardship in reaching the performance outcomes and major objectives. These management review conferences provide opportunities for open dialogue centered around problems that require coordination and cooperation throughout the entire school bureaucracy. If insufficient central office support is not making it possible for the school to reach its objectives, this management review provides an opportunity for the principal to express his concern.

The management review conferences have, in my experience, been the most productive aspect of the entire MBO system. These conferences force coordination, communication, and cooperative support among all the elements of a large and complex school system. These conferences provide an opportunity for the superintendent to review the performance commitments that the school has made to him. But more importantly, the management review conferences provide a forum for the principal to communicate his problems and to solicit understanding and support that is necessary if true performance accountability is to be attained in reaching major objectives on the local school level.

The twelfth step in this MBO model is an end-of-the-year evaluation of the performance outcomes. At this point, it is determined how well the

school did in reaching its objectives and major performance commitments. The evaluation can give recognition for outstanding performance. What is more important, however, is that the evaluation can make it possible for all concerned to assess outcomes and determine how more effective team work and cooperation can be attained as a new academic year and MBO cycle is launched.

The thirteenth and final step is preparation for a new needs assessment effort and the launching of a new MBO cycle for the subsequent school year.

The foregoing explanation has attempted to paint for you a word picture of MBO as a means for attaining performance accountability. As I see it, schools need a management system around which plans can be laid to solve problems and reach ever higher levels of accomplishment in serving the needs of students. MBO provides the school administrator with a systematic procedure for involving his staff in problem-solving efforts. If properly executed, MBO can be democratic in the best traditions of involving professional colleagues in participatory management. MBO keeps all staff members looking at the same targets and pulling toward performance outcomes that faculty members have accepted as desirable objectives worthy of special attention and concern. MBO provides the road map that all can read and from which all can attain a certain sense of momentum and accomplishment during the year. If a school does not know where it is going any road will get it there. But if a school can arrive at concensus concerning certain highly desirable outcomes that ought to and can be attained during an academic

year MBO will provide the administrative machinery for accomplishment. Whether it be MBO or some other administrative machinery, public education needs the results orientation and performance accountability mandated by a management system. Many of our large secondary schools are very difficult to manage in a manner that coordinates staff efforts, keeps lines of communication open, and permits the professionals to have a voice and a hand in the steering of the school toward its priority goals. We are going to hear more about the accountability movement. A management system such as MBO will help us to channel this interest and concern in a constructive way.

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